

Monadnock Block
53 West Jackson Boulevard at Dearborn Street
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1027

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
88-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

MONADNOCK BLOCK

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Location: 53 West Jackson Boulevard; southwest corner of Dearborn and Jackson Streets, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Russell Tyson et al., 53 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois.

Present Occupant: Office tenants.

Present Use: Offices and shops (ground floor).

Statement of Significance: Designated as a Chicago Architectural Landmark in 1958, the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks cited it: "In recognition of its original design and its historical interest as the highest wall-bearing structure in Chicago. Restrained use of brick, soaring massive walls, omission of ornamental forms, unite in a building simple yet majestic."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: (chain of title): Legal description of the property: Lots 5, 6, 7, 12, of Block 122, School Section Addition to Chicago of Section 16-39-14.

Abstract of chain of title found in Book 467a, pp. 149-154, Cook County Recorder's Office: Owen F. Aldis received Lots 5 and 6 from Sarah L. Brooks on April 19, 1890 (Document 1253936). Aldis received Lots 7 and 12 from Sheperd Brooks on February 7, 1888 (Document 105964). The property has continued, in various combinations, to be in the hands of Aldis and the Brooks Estate. The most recent entry in the Deed Book on January 29, 1960 names Russell Tyson et al. as owner.

Abstract of description of the ownership of the property found in: "Chicago Remodels a Landmark," Architectural Forum, October 1938; and Fuller, Ernest, "Famous Chicago Buildings," Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1958. Burnham and Root were originally commissioned to build the Monadnock by the Brooks Estate of Boston. Owen F. Aldis was manager of the Estate's Middle-Western properties. The Boston interests still retain most of the ownership. The building is managed by Aldis and Company, Graham Aldis, nephew of Owen, in charge.

2. Date of erection: 1891
3. Architect: Burnham and Root.
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: The general contractor was the George A. Fuller Company. The signatures of a number of suppliers are included in the original plans (Microfilm: Roll 2, Frames 24-26, 34, 69, Burnham Library). Joseph Eastman, Mac Kolite Plaster Board Co., Kansley Bros., United States Heating and Plumbing Co., Davidson _____ (Illegible), The Winslow Bros. Co., _____ (illegible), A. L. Deane & Co., Walcott Hurlbutt Company, and Standard Elevator Co.
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: The north half of what is now known collectively as the Monadnock Block (extending on Dearborn Street from Jackson to Van Buren Streets) was built in 1891. This portion is considered to be the original Monadnock Building, although it was designed as two buildings, The Monadnock and the Kearsarge. "Each was equipped with its own heating plant, elevator bank, stairs, and plumbing to make it more salable, should that contingency arise." (Fuller, Tribune, December 7, 1958.) The building has one basement, 16 stories, and a 17th story attic: a height of 215 feet. (Randall, 1949, p. 5: Fuller, Tribune, December 7, 1958). It has a floating raft foundation (Condit, 1952, p. 102) and spread footings extending 11 feet beyond the building into the surrounding streets (Randall, 1949, p. 15). The bearing walls are 6 feet thick at their base, and gradually taper in as they rise (Fuller, Tribune, December 7, 1958). The building was originally set up 8 inches. By 1905 it had settled below that point and the total settlement in 1948 was 20 inches. (Randall, 1949, p. 123). The first attempt at a portal system of wind bracing was made in the Monadnock (Randall, 1949, p. 15). The cost in 1891-93 was \$2,500,000 (Fuller, Tribune, December 7, 1958).

The following description was taken from: Harriet Monroe's John Wellborn Root (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896). pp. 141-142: "The Monadnock--'Jumbo', Root used to call it -- was the last of the tall buildings to show walls of solid masonry. For this building Mr. Aldis, who controlled the investment, kept urging upon his architects extreme simplicity, rejecting one or two of Root's sketches as too ornate. During Root's absence of a fortnight at the seashore, Mr. Burnham ordered from one of the draughtsmen a design of a straight-up-and-down, uncompromising, unornamented facade. When Root returned, he was indignant at first over this project of a brick box. Gradually, however, he threw himself into the spirit of the thing, and one day he told Mr. Aldis that the heavy sloping lines of an Egyptian pylon had gotten into his mind as the basis of this design, and that he would 'throw the thing up without a single ornament.'

At last, with a gesture whose pretense of disgust concealed a shy experimental interest, he threw on the drawing-table of Mr. Dutton, then foreman of the office, 'a design', says this gentleman, 'shaped something like a capital l--a perfectly plain building, curving outward at base and cornice.' This was the germ of the final design, and it provoked much discussion and study in the office. Mr. Dutton and others suggested modifications; the projecting base was carried up through two stories instead of one, the cornice modified, the lines of the bays carefully studied, Mr. Wegman tells of standing over Root's drawing board, and watching him draw in the Egyptian cornice; and many persons remember his desire to grade the color of the building from brown bricks at the bottom to yellow at the top--a project which only lack of time for the manufacture prevented..."

6. Notes on alterations and additions: In 1893, the south half of the Monadnock Block was added to the completed north half. Like the north half, it was designed as two buildings, the Katahdin and the Wachusett. (Note: The four buildings, Monadnock, Kearsarge, Katahdin and the Wachusett, of the Monadnock Block were named after New England Mountains). The architects were Holabird and Roche (Fuller, Tribune, December 7, 1958). Corydon T. Pardy was the engineer. It is also one basement and 17 stories high and has much smaller piers enclosing Z-bar columns used in both sections for interior columns. The original cost of the Katahdin, including architects' fees, was 39.247 cents per cubic foot, while the Wachusett cost 41.077 cents per cubic foot. The east wall of the entire Monadnock Block is now supported on hardpan caissons, built in 1940 at the time the subway was dug in South Dearborn Street (Randall, 1949, p. 123).

In 1938 the building was remodeled for \$125,000 by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in one of the first and largest such jobs in the office buildings field. Generally small, poorly lighted offices were remodeled to attract new tenants. The major changes were: "...1. Restyling the main entrance, 2. remodeling of the entrance foyer and connecting shops, 3. modernization of the twelfth floor, 4. modernization of all other public space on all floors, including corridors, wash room, elevator stalls, etc., and 5. progression of suite modernization to all floors as demand warrants." (Architectural Forum, October, 1938).

B. Sources of Information:

1. Primary Sources

- a. Burnham, Daniel Hudson, 1846-1912, Diaries 1895-1910, 16 vols. In manuscript. Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

- b. Burnham, Daniel Hudson, 1846-1912, Letters, business and personal, 1890-1912, 21 vols. Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.
- c. Chicago, Illinois. Monadnock Building, miscellaneous clippings and pamphlets in The Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.
- d. Original Drawings, Monadnock Building. North half Burnham and Root, architects, (1891), Microfilm: Roll 2, frames 1-71, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.

2. Published Sources:

- a. Condit, Carl W., The Rise of the Skyscraper (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 15, 78, 101-3, 111, 113, 144, 146. Photograph p. 36. Addition by Holabird and Roche pp. 101, 171-72. Photograph p. 121.
- b. "Custom-built modernization program," The Economist, March 26, 1938.
- c. Fuller, Ernest, "Famous Chicago Buildings," Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1958. Clippings, Chicago Historical Society Library.
- d. Gilbert, Paul and Bryson, Charles Lee, Chicago and Its Makers (Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, Publisher, 1929), Photograph p. 562.
- e. Harper's Weekly, Special Chicago number (New York: 1902), photograph p. 15.
- f. Kirkland, Joseph, The Story of Chicago, 2 volumes (Chicago: Dibble Publishing Co., 1892-1894), photograph vol. 2, p. 356.
- g. McClurg, Verne O., Monadnock building research material pertinent to the construction of the Chicago subway, Chicago, 1938-44, Microfilm: Roll 14, Frames 1-187, Burnham Library in the Art Institute of Chicago.
- h. Miscellaneous pamphlets, etc.: 2 pamphlets from Aldis & Company, agents for the Monadnock Block; reprints of "Monadnock Building to be Restyled," Chicago Tribune, January 16, 1938, part 5 - page 12, and "Chicago Remodels a Landmark," Architectural Forum, October 1938. Photographs. Located in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

- i. Monroe, Harriet, John Wellborn Root (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896), pp. 120, 123, 141-142.
- j. Moore, Charles, Daniel H. Burnham, 2 Volumes (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1921), pp. 25, 26, 30.
- k. Moses, John, History of Chicago, 2 Volumes (New York: Munsell & Co., 1895), photograph in vol 1, p. 252.
- l. "New Addition to Monadnock Building, Chicago," Architectural Record, vol. 5 (July - September, 1895), p. 76.
- m. Prominent Buildings erected by the George A. Fuller Co., (New York: George A. Fuller, 1904). Photograph p. 47. Plan - p. 46.
- n. Randall, Frank A., History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949), pp. 5, 14, 15, 19, 93, 123, 134, 156, 158, bibliography p. 123.
- o. Pebori, A. N., "The Work of Burnham and Root, D. H. Burnham - D. H. Burnham & Co. and Graham Burnham & Co.," Architectural Record, Vol. 38 (July 1915), p. 47, 50, photograph p. 39.
- p. Unrivaed Chicago (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1896). Photograph p. 14.
- q. Van Osde11, John Mills, A Quarter Century of Chicago Architecture (Chicago: R. E. Swift & Co., 1895), photograph p. 99.
- r. Tallmadge, Thomas E., Architecture in Old Chicago (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 151, 186, 190, 205.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Supervisory
Architect and
Larry J. Homolka, Historian
National Park Service
August, 1963

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. The Monadnock "was the greatest of all elevator buildings and the last 'skyscraper' to be built of solid masonry construction." [Tallmadge, Architecture in Old Chicago, pp. 151-152].
2. Condition of fabric: Good. Ground floor and interior altered. Parts of original ground floor on west side are in place.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories: 16 plus basement.
2. Overall dimensions: 70' (five-bay front) by 420' long including additions.
3. Lay-out shape: Tall, thin, rectangular slab.
4. Foundations: Floating raft foundation with rails and beams. Caissons added under west wall in 1940.
5. Wall construction: Dark brown brick, narrow mortar points. Molded brick at corners and intersections, flat continuous surfaces. Walls flared at second floor level, gradually chamfered corners beginning with no chamfer at the base increasing to a slice about 4' wide at the top.
6. Structural system, framing: Solid masonry - bearing walls on the exterior, cast-iron columns support inner floor and roof leads.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorways framed with large black blocks of stone and deep stone lintels. Later doors.
 - b. Windows: Double hung wooden windows, single light sash. Two tiers of bay windows on north side, five on east and west sides, continuous from third through fifteenth floor. Extremely simple openings in masonry for windows. Thin iron window sills. Three ground floor shop fronts in place on west side, simple light wooden framing.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat.

- b. Cornice, eaves: brick walls flared out at the top to form a cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Shops on ground floor, offices above. Central corridor runs length of building, north and south. Offices around perimeter. Arched openings in party walls between the four sections of the building visible in the corridors. Original building held 1,600 offices and 18 passenger elevators.
2. Stairways: Original cast-iron stairway in center hall, open well, continuous to top floor.

D. Site:

The building, in the downtown Chicago area, is on the east side of Dearborn Street, extending the full length of the block between Jackson Street on the north and Van Buren Street on the south. Entrances open on all sides, with the principal entrance to the original section on the north.

Prepared by Osmund Overby, Supervisory Architect,
National Park Service
September, 1963

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The records of this structure were made during the 1963 Chicago II Project. This was the second in a series of summer projects designed to record the significant architecture of the Chicago area. The project was sponsored by Mr. Earl A. Reed, FAIA. He was assisted by a Finance committee composed of John Fugard, FAIA; William E. Hartmann, FAIA; Alfred Shaw, FAIA; and a Selection committee consisting of James Arkin, AIA; Ruth Schoneman, Art Institute of Chicago; and J. Carson Webster, Northwestern University. Organizations cooperating with HABS in this project were the City of Chicago; the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, its Foundation, the Garrick Salvage Fund; and the Women's Architectural League of Chicago. The City of Chicago provided office space, and the Illinois Institute of Technology furnished living quarters.

Mr. James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect at the time, was in overall charge of HABS summer programs. Dr. Osmund Overby, then of the University of Toronto, now the University of Missouri, served as project supervisor. Other members of the summer team were student architects Janis Erins (Illinois Institute of Technology), Robert C. Giebner (Miami University, Ohio), and David Van Zanten (Princeton University). The photographic work was done by Cervin Robinson in 1963.